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ST. GEORGE'S OPERA HOUSE, LONDON.

The bill of the first night was made up of two little pieces by Offenbach and an operetta in two acts by the authors of the immortal *Cox and Box*. *Puss in Petticoats*, the opening piece, is an English version of M. Offenbach's operatic arrangement of the ingenious little *vaudeville* entitled, *La Chatte Métamorphosée en Femme*. The piece is founded on, or rather has been suggested by, the old fable of the girl who had once been a cat, and who becomes a cat again as soon as she sees a mouse. The idea might well be treated in a comedy or a drama. Those who have read Liszt's curious literary fantasy, *De la Musique des Bohémien*, &c., will remember how the gipsy servant, whom he thought he had civilized (by dressing him in a black coat), ran away from him on hearing the songs of his tribe—ran after his mouse, in fact—and, joining his old companions, resumed the savage life of his infancy. The only gipsy woman who, according to Mr. Borrow, ever became civilized used, I have heard, in her uncivilized moments, to run about the streets of Moscow (to the annoyance of the Count her husband) without shoes or stockings; she, also, had seen her mouse. Dumas the younger has studied this sort of metamorphosis in his *Affaire Clémenceau*, in which the vicious cat of the story shows herself a vicious cat whenever her true nature is appealed to.

M. Scribe in his *Chatte Métamorphosée en Femme*, has not thought of treating the subject philosophically. The hero of his piece is a student who, having read those incomprehensible works, *Faust* and *Werther*, becomes partially insane, falls in love with his cat, and wonders whether he shall ever see her in human form. Why a man or boy should, as the result of reading *Werther*, fall in love with his cat is a much greater mystery than any that is to be found in the first or even in the second part of *Faust*. Perhaps it was not the simple story of *Werther* and Charlotte, but the incident in *Faust* of the poodle who turns into Mephistopheles, that first gave M. Scribe's student the notion of the convertibility of cats into women. If a black poodle produces Mephistopheles, what ought a white Angora cat to produce? That, no doubt, was the problem with which the student had been racking his brain. Only M. Scribe should have said so.

The cat in the operetta, like a few other cats in France, is known as "Minette" (at the St. George's Opera House they call her "Minnit," and "Madamazel Minnit," which is painful to the ear), and she continues to bear this caress-inviting name after her metamorphosis into a woman. The actress who plays the part ought to be very fair, very graceful, and to have as much as possible of the soft confiding manner of the true Angora. Mlle. Nilsson would look it to perfection, and could do all that is required in it except the scratching. The representative of Minette at the St. George's Hall gives too much prominence to the sharp side of the character, and seems to forget that Minette was not the ordinary cat—the "harmless necessary cat" of our English hearths and homes—but an Angora of the noblest breed. At the end of the piece, when the student has discovered that the Minette in human form is his cousin, who has behaved to him in a cat-like manner (and, let me add, with a

marked exaggeration of the bad points in the feline character), in order to cure him of his passion for the quadruped Minette, then a real unimpeachable white Angora of marvellous beauty is exhibited as the identical being that first turned the young man's head. Instead of yelling at the music, as a dog would do, the well-bred, calm, collected Angora preserves a decorous silence, and gracefully beats time with her long sweeping tail. This charming member of the new opera company, who the other night made her first appearance on any stage, should have been called for on the fall of the curtain. Perhaps, however, the audience were thinking of the old nursery rhyme—"The dog will come when he is called, the cat will run away."

How pleased M. Offenbach must have been to write a part for a cat! In *Barkouf*, of unhappy memory, he had already written a part for a dog; and as in *Barkouf* the dog barked, so there is a trio in *La Chatte*, in which the cat, or cat-girl, mews. Fancy a so-called musical piece with a refrain of "Miaou, miaou, miaou!"

Puss in Petticoats is followed by Mr. Sullivan's new operetta, *The Contrabandista*, for which Mr. F. C. Burnand has supplied the libretto. And a capital libretto it is. The main idea is very humorous. The story is simple, and so intelligible that it might be told in pantomime. The verse scattered through it is lively, rhythmical, and well adapted for musical setting. What more could a composer of opera buffa want? Mr. Sullivan, to judge from the result of his work, must have been quite satisfied. His score contains two graceful airs of a sentimental cast, a comic air, which is simply a masterpiece, some clever concerted music, some spirited dance music, appropriately Spanish in character, and two animated well worked-up *finales*. The piece is, we are told, founded on a farce by Messrs. Burnand and Montague Williams. This farce I have had the disadvantage (perhaps on this occasion it was an advantage) of not seeing. It consists of the history of a photographer who, traveling in Spain, falls among thieves—otherwise *ladrones*—and is appointed to the vacant post of chief, being at the same time required to marry the widow of his deceased predecessor in command. The photographer is a Mr. Grigg; and Grigg, coming down from the mountains, sings, like the celebrated "vacuus viator," in presence of the thieves. And a wonderful song he sings; his theme being the pleasures of home, the delights of domesticity, and the happiness that he will enjoy when he gets back to England and finds himself once more in the congenial society of "his spouse, his cows, and his sows." The thieves, who unperceived have listened to him and watched him, at last come forward and seize him while his head is buried beneath the curtain of his camera. Then what I have already indicated takes place. Grigg—represented to perfection by Mr. Shaw, who makes of him a living caricature in the style of Leech—has to marry the late captain's widow (Miss Franklein) and to assume the leadership of the band. Moreover, his betrothed, who is a woman of spirit, requires him to murder the lieutenant, after which it has been arranged that the sub-lieutenant (we are not quite sure about the grades) shall kill him. From these difficulties and dangers Grigg and the lieutenant escape by bringing the Queen's troops down upon the robbers, who are pardoned on con-

dition of enlisting.

Without going further into details, let me briefly say that the music of the piece is charming, and that the dialogue is full of humor. Grigg, by the way, ought not, when in peril of his life, to make a pun (which we fancy we must have heard before) on *crown* the top of a hat, and *crown* the emblem of royalty. Here Mr. Burnand must allow us to say that he runs after his pun as the interesting Minette in the previous piece runs after her mouse. If I were marking Mr. Burnand's points for him, I should put this one against him. Further on, however, occurs a good joke, in the form of an *equivoque*, as was ever heard. "I will go and alarm the soldiers," says the lieutenant. To which after a moment's reflection, poor Grigg replies, "But don't alarm them too much, or they won't come."

THAT DIAMOND PIN AGAIN.

We discussed this question at length some months ago, proving in the clearest manner the absurdity of the claim advanced by Mr. Nichols to the ownership of the diamond pin presented to Mr. G. L. Brown by his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. We argued successfully from facts far less potent than those revealed in the letter which we quote from the Boston *Saturday Evening Gazette*. There is no name attached to the communication, but we are satisfied that that highly respectable journal is fully posted as to the name of the writer. The following is the letter verbatim:

Boston, January 4, 1868.

Editors of the *Gazette*:

The unjust and injurious statements that are circulating in reference to the action of Mr. George L. Brown, my personal friend, in the matter of the diamond pin given by the Prince of Wales when "the Crown of New England" was presented to him, induces me to ask that you permit me to make a truthful explanation of some of the facts which are now so strangely perverted.

When the Prince of Wales was here, Mr. Nichols met Mr. Brown one evening and said to him, "We are getting up something nice for you," and then stated that a number of gentlemen (naming Mr. Beecher and Mr. Hurlburt as the leading spirits among them) were getting up subscriptions of fifty dollars each in order to raise two thousand dollars to buy his picture of the "Bay of New York," then on exhibition, for presentation to the royal visitor. Mr. Nichols at that time was the agent of Mr. Brown—engaged in selling his pictures—and had the "Bay of New York" on exhibition at his room. He added that half of the sum specified had already been subscribed.

On the strength of these representations, the painting was presented to the Prince, through Lord Lyons, by Mr. Hurlburt, at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, on behalf of the gentlemen of New York. It is represented now by some persons that the painting was the present of Mr. Nichols.

The presentation took place on a Saturday in October, 1860; on the Monday following, Mr. Hurlburt notified Mr. Brown of the transfer; but the artist had as yet never received a single dollar of the promised amount.

Mr. Nichols still retained possession of the picture; still exhibited it at his rooms; but continued to postpone payment. Mr. Brown,

after some months delay, became impatient and threatened to take possession of the painting unless payment was made for it. Mr. Nichols gave as a reason for his failure to pay, that the hard times had made people unwilling to subscribe and that "the gentlemen of New York" had backed out. In January and February of 1861, Mr. Nichols paid in three subscriptions of fifty dollars each—saying that he could not raise any more,—but he offered to pay the artist three hundred and fifty dollars in addition to what he had just handed over—in all five hundred dollars—for the painting and take his own risk of getting in the subscriptions. Although this was an offer to pay fifteen hundred dollars less than promised, Mr. Brown was constrained to accept it. At the same time Mr. Nichols bought from Mr. Brown "the Crown of New England"—a Mount Washington sunrise—"Niagara by moonlight" and an etching of the Bay and City of New York—for five hundred dollars each. Mr. Nichols took out the Prince's picture to England and presented it to him, and at the same time sold him *at a prodigious profit*, "The Crown of New England," under the pretence that it was the property of Mr. Brown. This was Mr. Nichols's own declaration. The money for it was sent by a member of the Household to be forwarded to the British Consul for Mr. Brown.

Now, under these circumstances, surely it is preposterous to imagine that the Prince would have given Mr. Nichols, for himself, a diamond pin valued at five hundred dollars in gold, when his only agency in the matter was to deliver the painting in England after its formal presentation in New York. So far from Mr. Nichols having been one of the original contributors to the painting, he was acting as the artist's agent simply, in the expectation of receiving three hundred dollars for his trouble—that is, fifteen per cent. on the amount (two thousand dollars) that was asked for the work. Mr. Nichols went to England not to present the painting from any disinterested motive, but to carry a *clouccur* in one hand and a bargain in the other, Mr. Nichols boasted of his shrewdness. It was certainly a "Yankee trick"—but surely too transparent to be rewarded with a diamond pin!

Mr. Nichols wrote to Mr. Brown from England that he had been presented with a diamond pin by H. R. H.; but, in a letter to the *Evening Post*, of the same date, he cautiously worded it—"a pin has been put into my hands." No wonder that many persons should have suspected at the time that the pin was evidently not meant for him; for whatever may be Mr. Nichols's failings, a lack of self-appreciation is not among them. If the pin had been intended for him, he would have taken pains to let it be widely known. He was accused at the time of wearing laurels intended for the artist, and it was the universal impression among artists at the time, and is so still, that no such honor was ever intended for an agent. So much for the claim to the pin.

Mr. Nichols, when asked why the Prince should have given him a pin, said that he caused him to believe that he was sent out by the gentlemen of New York; that Sir Robert Bruce wrote a letter to Mr. Beecher, as chairman, which satisfied him that the Prince bought the "Crown of New England," supposing it to be the property of the artist, as a compliment to Mr. Brown; and that he, Nichols, got the diamond pin by causing

them to believe that he was somebody! This was the only explanation he could ever give of it.

Now, it is utterly false that Mr. Brown ever made any attempt to recover the pin. He did, indeed, always believe that it was intended for him, and not for a speculator in his pictures; but he never made a motion to make good his claims. This was done, after six years elapsed, by a Danish artist, of New York, Mr. Melbye, at the solicitation of several English gentlemen, who offered their influence at court to obtain correct information about it. Mr. Melbye wrote; General Sir William Knollys replied:

"On submitting your letter for the perusal of the Prince, His Royal Highness was pleased to say that he could have no doubt that the pin was intended for the acceptance of the artist, and not the agent; and on mentioning the matter to one or two gentlemen who were in the suite of His Royal Highness at the time referred to, they fully concurred in the prince's opinion."

Not until this letter was received, did Mr. Brown take any measures to secure the pin.

Mr. Nichols, it would appear, by *ex parte* statements, has, after the lapse of a long time, and after the death of the most prominent of the Prince's suite who knew the circumstances of the case, procured another statement from him. But it could only have been through a misunderstanding of the facts of the case. The truth is, I take it, that rather than be bored about it by either party, the Prince and Sir W. Knollys, seeing that the pin is in the hands of Nichols, prefer to do an injustice to the artist. It is right, however, when New York journals, in the interest of the agent, attack a Boston artist, a Boston journal should present a true statement of the case.

Very truly, yours, R.

[From the *Saturday Evening Gazette*.]

ON MUSICAL VARIATIONS.

It is as well, perhaps, to confess at the very outset that we are one of those well-meaning but unfortunate people, who have not what is usually termed a "musical ear."

That is, we like music, indeed we can almost say with a gushing young creature of our acquaintance that we "adore and hang upon it,"—we delight in the society of musicians, seedy and well-to-do, hail them from the old world, or be they aspirants of the new—we play a little with one hand on the piano, and amuse ourselves as we walk the streets by grumbling to ourselves little sweet snatches of song—we always go to "Don Giovanni" and the symphony concert, because it shows an appreciation of the old masters, and because, however little we understand, we feel conscious that it is a far more ennobling employment than listening to the young ladies in our boarding-house who are taking lessons at the Conservatory.

But notwithstanding all these efforts to be musical, our friends say that we have no ear, that we lack cultivation dreadfully, and that so long as we take delight in whistling alto to an organ-grinder, they must disown all connection with us.

They do, however, occasionally drop in on their way to a particularly classical concert-hall, to ask if we would not like to meet a few of Boston's musical elite, and have our taste elevated a little.

We are not very partial to these assemblies, however, since we are conscious of an entire

lack of appreciation, and consequently disturb and bring disgrace upon our companions by applauding when every one else is disgusted, and showing our contempt for the sweetest and most ravishing strains which the audience hears in an Elysium of delight, by gaping or staring through our opera-glass, at the pretty girls in the gallery.

All this of course is only another proof that we have no ear, no refined taste, no appreciation of fugues and thorough bass. We went, however, at the earnest solicitation of a friend not long since to hear a distinguished pianist. His great skill laid in the power which he had of executing wonderful variations and accompaniments, and indeed if musical zampillaerostation be a desirable profession, this gentleman deserves all possible credit for having progressed so far in it.

His hand flew with such wonderful rapidity in every direction, now from treble to base, soaring above his head, then drooping exhausted below his knees, now skimming like magic the key-board, and now thundering out a single chord, that he might well be termed the "harmonious gymnast." But we refer particularly to his variations. We went there feeling deeply our musical deficiency, and determined to improve, yet we sat in the most blissful ignorance of anything save a torrent, a cataract of sound, intermingled now and then with a bang upon a particular note which our friend said was the air. It is needless to say that we had no idea of an air. At last, in response to an encore, the musician played "Home, sweet Home," and being tolerably familiar with that tune, we made up our mind to follow it or die.

We mastered the first two notes pretty well, but there it seemed to become choked, strangled and swamped in an incessant stream of trills and arpeggios. We lost ourselves in the maze of quavers which the performer scattered over the piano. How we stretched our ears for the next base bang, to tell us that the poor tune had got its half-smothered head out once more, and how frantic we became when the bang did not come at the time our ideas of rhythm told us that it should come.

Now, if these gymnastics are artistic in music, why not in poetry? Why not give at once the standard poetry of the day into the hands of each reader, to tinker at pleasure? We should attack "Hamlet's" soliloquy, which is sadly in need of improvement, thus:

"To be, fiddle—or not to be, diddle—
That is the question, de roi de dol day,
Whether 'tis nobler, doodle—in the mind to suffer,
Pood-e—
The slings and arrows, noodle—of outrageous fortune,
Foodle—
Or to take arms, kafoozlum—against a sea of troubles,
kaboozlum—and by opposing end them, ti roodle,
ti roodle, ti roodle, ti ray."

Or, take Tennyson, and tinker his effusions in the same way:

Tears, idle tears, Jerusalem!
I know not what they mean, Bamboozlum!

We were at the opera, a few nights since, and very much charmed by a beautiful duet. It was sweetly and understandingly sung. Suddenly both singers stopped short in what seemed to us the middle, walked a little way apart, and then began a series of vocal gymnastics; of trills, quavers, ups and downs, now loud and now low, like a song run mad. It might have been the very essence of classical music; but it had very much the same effect upon our unapprecia-